

AMERICAN BRASS COMPANY, KENOSHA WORKS,
HOT ROLL MILL
1420 63rd Street
Kenosha
Kenosha County
Wisconsin

HAER No. WI-77-A

HAER
WIS
30-KEN,
1A-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
AMERICAN BRASS COMPANY, KENOSHA WORKS, HOT ROLL MILL
HAER No. WI-77-A

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Location: 1420 63rd Street
Kenosha
Kenosha County
Wisconsin

Date of Construction: 1917-1918

Present Owner: Outokumpu Copper Kenosha

Present Use: Abandoned

Significance: Originally installed by the American Brass Company in 1917-18, this hand-operated rolling mill was placed on line in 1918. Workers manipulated hot billets through the rolling mill, producing copper and non-ferrous alloys for the electrical industry. This production activity was housed in a building, called the No. 31 Hot Roll Mill, in the Kenosha Works of the American Brass Company. The mill operated for about seventy years, closing in 1988.

Historian: Gray Fitzsimons, 1988

Project Information: This documentation project of the American Brass Company's Kenosha Works, specifically No. 31 Hot Roll Mill, was undertaken in concert with a larger HAER study of rolling mill technology. HAER would like to thank Frederic U. Smith, Employee Involvement Coordinator, American Brass in Buffalo, New York, and Bill Girman, Employee Relations Manager, American Brass, in Kenosha, for their help in the photographic documentation of Kenosha's No. 31 Hot Roll Mill.

Founded in 1886 by the Chicago Brass Company, the brass plant in Kenosha was acquired in 1901 by the Coe family, owners of the Coe Brass Company which, in turn, was controlled by the American Brass Company, the largest brass manufacturing concern in the United States. In 1921 The Anaconda Copper Mining Company gained a controlling interest in American Brass, with the Coe family retained to run this large concern. After Anaconda and its subsidiary firms were purchased by the Atlantic Richfield Company (ARCO), the Kenosha works was operated as ARCO Metals. This ended in 1985 when ARCO divested itself of its metals manufacturing plants, selling them to a group of investors who renamed the enterprise the American Brass Company. A Swedish firm, Outokumpu Copper, acquired the Kenosha works in 1991 and currently operates the plant.¹

Originally constructed on farmland in Kenosha in 1886, the Kenosha Works of the American Brass Company included a hot roll mill for the production of wire used in the electrical manufacturing industry. This hot roll mill was constructed in 1917-18 when American Brass expanded its Kenosha Works to meet wartime production needs. The company placed this production facility under its newly created Commutator Department and contracted with the Standard Engineering Company (probably of Providence, Rhode Island²), to manufacture the electric-motor-driven three-high rolling mill. The mill was placed on line in 1918 at which time the Kenosha Works employed as many as 2,400 workers. The hand-operated rolling mill required a highly-skilled crew of about fifteen to twenty workers who guided the hot billets from a gas-fired furnace through a series of three-high mills to produce copper and copper-alloy wire.³ In addition to the rolling mill, the facility included a gas-fired pusher-

¹For a brief company history of the American Brass Company's Kenosha Works see "American Brass: 100 Years of Progress," in a special advertising section of the Kenosha News, September 21, 1986.

²The records HAER examined from the American Brass Company's Kenosha Works identified the manufacturer of the three-high rolling mill only as the Standard Engineering Company. This concern was likely the same company known by the 1940s as the Standard Machinery Company of Providence, Rhode Island, producers of rolling mills for non-ferrous strip, rod, and wire-making facilities.

³Information on the No. 31 Hot Roll Mill at Kenosha was obtained from the American Brass Company's engineering records. These records include general specifications for the contract to construct the hot roll mill, dated May 31, 1917, and an inventory of machinery and equipment in the hot roll mill, dated September 30, 1957, updated September 19, 1967. HAER has photocopies of these documents in its office file on American Brass Company's Kenosha Works.

type billet-heating furnace manufactured by the Electric Furnace Company of Salem, Ohio, a hot-strip winder manufactured by the Morgan Construction Company, a 25 hp General Electric motor, and a 400 hp, 2,200-volt Allis Chalmers motor. With the exception of a few minor modifications, the hot roll mill was operated with this equipment for about eighty years. The American Brass Company changed hands a number of times prior to the closing of the hand-operated hot roll mill in 1988.